PEACEFUL PENETRATION

THE year 1904 will be chiefly remarkable in African history for three things: the conclusion of the Anglo-French Agreement, the wide-spread development of the cotton-growing movement, and the considerable influx of European settlers into regions lying between the Tropics, which have only recently come to be regarded as suitable for white colonisation. It was in connection with the first of these events, and referring more especially to Morocco, that the pleasant-sounding phrase "peaceful penetration" became popular. But there is an older motto which has left its mark on Africa, and one which must continue to claim the attention of those who would avoid the disastrous strife which so often attends the earlier stages of European enterprise in the Dark Continent—"Nothing for nothing, and not much for sixpence."

The events of the past year all emphasise the fact that the price of peace and profitable development in Africa is, first and foremost, *railway construction*. Whether the object aimed at is peaceful penetration or the military ascendency which must too often precede it, commercial development, or unity of administration—railways and navigable waterways are more than ever necessary at this critical stage of African development. Those Powers which have spent the most money on productive works are already beginning to reap where they have sown. Systematic railway construction in Algeria and its south-western borderlands, is the foundation and the main support to French claims over Morocco. A similar policy wisely pursued will eventually give France the predominance in West Africa. On the eastern side of the

continent it is consolidating British rule, with but one small gap from the Cape to Cairo, and has already opened to white colonisation the healthy highlands of Equatorial Africa.

On the other hand, the past year has revealed most plainly the results of a penny-wise policy in British Somaliland and in German East and South-West Africa, all of which countries have been outstripped by their younger rivals and neighbours at Jibuti, in British East Africa, and in Rhodesia. It is melancholy to think that a timely outlay of only about £800,000 would have endowed British Somaliland with a railway from the coast to Harar, of the greatest strategical and commercial importance—a line which might have actually saved us more than two millions sterling at the outset, by effectually pacifying the recalcitrant Mullah, and would have also secured for the British Somali ports much of the Abyssinian trade, which is now diverted to the benefit of their successful rival, Jibuti. The same policy of parsimony and procrastination in railway-building has had precisely similar results in South-West Africa, where the Germans are terribly hampered in their military operations by the absence of a rapid and effective transport service, essential for the maintenance of a large and mobile force in the heart of a hostile country—a land which is destitute of nearly everything that a European army requires yet is capable of development when once subdued. In the past year Germany has spent £5,000,000 on this worrying little war, and may have to spend more than twice as much again before it is concluded. The expenditure a few years ago of a fraction of that sum on the strategic railways proposed by local experts would probably have nipped rebellion in the bud.

The peaceful influence of the railway is threefold. First, it brings remote regions within reach of that healthy publicity which alone can punish and prevent acts of injustice and cruelty on the part of white men, of a nature to provoke savage reprisals from the natives; secondly, it creates a demand for local labour, and by offering lucrative employment to idle and restless young men turns their thoughts and energy from their old pursuits of raiding and brigandage;

thirdly, it impresses on the minds of ignorant and fanatical tribes better than anything else the real power of the white man. A striking illustration of this kind of peaceful penetration is offered by the recently-built railway through Southern Oran, in the Algerian hinterland. Within the last year the fierce Tawareq nomads of this region have been converted into peaceful traders and labourers, having found, by experience, that warfare is no longer a paying profession. Simultaneously, colonies of Frenchmen, Spaniards, Jews, and Levantine Greeks are settling down as merchants, mechanics, and agriculturists in this once desolate region.

The international cotton-growing movement in Africa, which for all practical purposes dates from the commencement of 1904, will more than anything else justify further railway extension and thus complete the work of peaceful development by creating a demand for well-paid labour in regions where slavery still lingers. This is especially the case in the Sudan, that magnificent cotton field of the future, which extends intermittently from the interior of Senegambia across the upper and middle course of the Niger and the basin of Lake Chad to the Nile Valley and the furthermost limits of the Egyptian railway system, now to be extended eastwards to Suakin, on the Red Sea coast.

Many of these future cotton lands must lie dormant till they are connected by railway with the sea. In other places much has been done already by the natives, in spite of transport difficulties, and it is certain that a tremendous development would take place once these were overcome. I need only instance the isolated city of Kano, in Northern Nigeria. This ancient walled town is the commercial centre of a fertile district some hundred-thousand square miles in extent which is capable of growing vast supplies of excellent cotton. This assertion requires no proof, for the industrious people of these parts have, for many years, grown enough raw cotton for their local needs and manufactures, and have even exported a certain amount annually over the old caravan route across the Sahara to Tripoli. But it is obvious that these very primitive conditions of transport must seriously limit the

expansion of this industry. Yet all that is needed to place this rich cotton district in direct steam communication with Lancashire, is the construction of a little more than two hundred miles of light railway from Kano to Zungeru and the navigable portion of the river Kadua; which stream is a tributary of the Niger and therefore accessible from the sea.

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